UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION COMMITTEE (UEC)

Minute of the Meeting held on 25 August 2021

Present: Ruth Taylor (Chair), Euan Bain, John Barrow, Jason Bohan, Abbe Brown, Javier Gonzalez Cuervos, Bill Harrison, Richard Hepworth, Gerry Hough, Alison Jenkinson, Kirsty Kiezebrink, David McCausland, Tim Mighall, Graeme Nixon, Rona Patey, Michelle Pinard, Shona Potts, Dean Robson (for Leigh Bjorkvoll), Anne-Michelle Slater, Susan Stokeld, Lindsay Tibbetts, Steve Tucker and Russell Williams with Rachael Bernard, Julie Bray, Nick Edwards, Tracey Innes, Gillian Mackintosh, Patricia Spence and Morag MacRae (Acting Clerk) in attendance

Apologies: Simon Bains, Harminder Battu, Leigh Bjorkvoll, Stuart Durkin, Emma Hay, Brian Henderson, Ondrej Kucerak, Fiona Ritchie and Kath Shennan

ABERDEEN INSTITUTE OF DATA SCIENCE AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AT SCNU

1.1 The Committee heard a presentation from the Chair which gave some background to the nature of the Joint Institute (JI) partnership with South China Normal University (SCNU).

1.2 2021/22 Dates of Term:  

(copy filed as UEC/250821/001a)

Members of the Committee heard a summary of the proposed term dates for the 2021/22 academic year.

(i) There were concerns surrounding the fact that resit results will not be known until three weeks into the subsequent academic year, which may be problematic for SCNU students. However, it was confirmed that discussions had taken place with SCNU and agreement reached that this was the most appropriate approach given the timelines of the academic year and the need to ensure that students are able to progress. In addition, students who failed to progress could continue with their SCNU degree rather than the dual degree. It was agreed to make this clear in the JI Student Handbook.

(ii) The Committee approved the term dates as proposed.

1.3 Regulatory Requirements:  

(copy filed as UEC/250821/001b)

Members of the Committee heard a summary of the regulatory requirements for the JI.

(i) There were concerns that the credit loading translated into a very demanding workload for students. However, it was noted that the credit load excluding English language requirements was around 480 credits. The Committee heard that most degrees at SCNU have a higher credit load than those at the University of Aberdeen and hence the proposed programme structures were not unusual for students. Nevertheless, student workload will be monitored and is identified on the Risk Register. It was also highlighted that the role of Student Counsellor at SCNU is one which focuses on supporting students and identifying and following up those who appeared to be struggling with engagement or attendance.

(ii) It was highlighted that students on the Business Management Option 1 route are precluded from attaining a designated award due to achieving insufficient credits by the end of Level
3. However, as these students will attain other credit from SCNU courses, they will be able to make up any shortfall to allow them to exit with the designated award. The terminology in the programme prescriptions was queried, specifically in reference to the use of Programme Year rather than Level. However, it was noted that the document was created using the University’s standard prescription format, and that all courses had been approved by the Quality Assurance Committee as being at the correct level.

(iii) The regulatory requirements were approved.

1.4 Approaches to Education Policy: (copy filed as UEC/250821/001c)

The Committee heard a summary of the proposed approaches to education policy pertaining to the operation of the JI.

(i) It was explained that grade mapping had been completed to ensure the effective translation of SCNU grades to established University of Aberdeen practices, in a similar vein to those established for existing SCNU-Aberdeen partnerships. The only shared course will be the dissertation and, although the associated assessment of the course is still to be determined, it is likely to be marked using the University’s Common Grading Scale. It was noted that the cut off between achieved/not achieved border is different to the standard UoA grading, and it was suggested to check whether “satisfactory” or “pass” was the correct University term for D band grades.

Action: Gillian Mackintosh

(ii) The challenges of the differences between the JI and University of Aberdeen based programmes and the related timings for examiners’ meetings was highlighted. However, it was confirmed that specific exam boards would be scheduled for JI students.

(iii) The Committee discussed the monitoring process, and its link to absence reporting. Further work is to be done regarding monitoring, which will likely be focused on failure to submit coursework rather than attendance. This will form part of an institution-wide monitoring review, which will take place in the Autumn.

(iv) The approaches to education policy were approved as being appropriate for use within the JI.

1.5 The amendments suggested by both UEC and QAC will be made prior to the finalised documents being circulated to the appropriate committees.

2021/22 EDUCATION POLICY

It was highlighted to the Committee that the amendments to policy were proposed solely for the purposes of addressing prior changes made to ensure appropriateness of policy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.1 Student Absence Policy: (copy filed as UEC/250821/002)

(i) In terms of absence, a footnote was to be included in the policy to clarify to what the term “absence” refers, as well as further clarity on situations in which evidence is required.
(ii) With reference to section 1.4, it was noted that healthcare (and potentially other) students sometimes report absence through their placement or VLE rather than using the Student Hub. Additionally, students with mental health considerations may struggle to provide evidence in a timely manner and hence it was noted that a degree of flexibility may be required in some cases.

(iii) It was to be clarified in the policy that the policy applies only to Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught students. The Postgraduate Research School intend to investigate whether a similar policy should be adopted for their students.

(iv) Concerns were raised over reverting to “business as usual” when the institution remains in a transitional period. However, it was clarified that the approach to the requirement for evidence had been developed on the basis of information from the NHS / GP providers. As identified within the policy, letterheaded evidence is no longer required thus reducing burden. The need to monitor this process was emphasised, and conversations were to continue offline between Student Support and AUSA.

(v) The Committee queried whether the University would contact carers or family members if required, and if so, whether the policy should refer to such a process. It was confirmed that this could be done in cases with strong concerns, and an emergency contact process existed within Student Support to this end. It was agreed to refer to this process in the absence policy, should it be agreed to be appropriate when undertaking the absence and monitoring policy review.

(vi) It was noted that the absence reporting system should be monitored closely in case of students who mention suicide in their submission, particularly outwith normal working hours. It was suggested that automatic scanning of the system may be possible, which would in turn initiate an emergency response. It was highlighted that pastoral lead training been recently completed, and this could be rolled out at School level.  

(vii) It was queried whether retrospective evidence should be accepted for students with mental health considerations, particularly those who appeal after failing assessments. However, it was reiterated that the policy amendments were intended only to reverse emergency COVID-19 mitigations, and that other suggestions would be investigated during the planned assessment of absence and monitoring policy. It was noted that due consideration is given on a case-by-case basis.

(viii) The amendments listed here will be made, prior to the circulation to the Committee of all documents for final approval.

2.2 Assessment and Feedback: (copy filed as UEC/250821/003)

(i) It was again highlighted to the Committee that the University remains in a period of transition, and this should be borne in mind with reference to assessment and feedback. However, it was also noted that the No Detriment procedures and Comprehensive Measures remain effective for relevant students, and that standard University procedures existed which ensured that students were supported during times of difficulty.

(ii) In Section 4.2 of the introductory paper, it was suggested that clarification might be required in terms of programme length and the related entry to Honours, particularly for
language students who do not enter Honours until their fourth year of study. It was agreed that referring to the year of entry to Honours would provide clarity.

(iii) Section 4.2 specifies that Postgraduate Taught exit velocity must be relevant to the programme, but it was queried whether students are aware of the use of exit velocity within their own programme. It was emphasised that the policy would not be changed at this stage, but guidance could be added to clarify existing processes and procedures. It would perhaps be required to clarify the employment of exit velocity within individual programmes.

(iv) Subject to these modifications, the proposed amendments were approved. Final copies of the policy will be circulated to the Committee in due course.

2.3 Internal Teaching Review (ITR): (copy filed as UEC/250821/004)

(i) It was queried whether guidance could be included on the accommodation required for any on-campus ITR events, and it was confirmed that this would be issued by Academic Services as part of the organisation of the ITR.

(ii) The Committee discussed whether partner institutes, such as AFG in Qatar and the newly formed JI in China, would be included in future ITRs. It was noted that QA processes exist for TNE partnerships, but that all collaborative provision is currently addressed through ITR processes.

(iii) The widening of the pool of staff invited to participate in an ITR panel was welcomed by the Committee.

(iv) All amendments were approved by the Committee.

AOB

3.1 Abbe Brown had undertaken further investigation surrounding the provision of extra time for assessment. The updated proposal will suggest doubling the original time period, with students entitled to 100% extra time receiving additional time on top of this provision. Abbe will circulate the updated paper to UEC in due course.  

Action: Abbe Brown

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

4.1 Members of the Committee noted that the next meeting would be held on Wednesday 10 November 2021, at 2pm, likely by Microsoft Teams.

2021 NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY (NSS)  
(copy filed as UEC/250821/005)

5.1 Members of the Committee noted the initial analysis of the 2021 National Student Survey (NSS).